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Cover Page Footnote

All referenced materials is in Arabic, except the material from Wold Bank, Nafaa, the King's speech, Mekouar, Marighella Igrouane, Howe and CBS News. All translation is the author's own.

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Abstract

Using Moroccan sources associated with the Islamist movement, this paper outlines the theological and political challenges facing Morocco in terms of violent extremism, especially those posed by certain Wahhabi and Salafist views that reject mainstream Moroccan Islam. It outlines the state's response to terrorism and evaluates its causes as offered by several Islamist Moroccan intellectuals.

Keywords: violent extremism, Salafism, Wahhabism, Islamism, Morocco, political reform

Introduction

Many Moroccans believed their country to be immune to terrorist attacks after September 11, 2001. This belief was associated with a narrative of exceptionalism that held the Kingdom of Morocco to be exempt from extremism because of its traditionalist approach to Islam, and the relationship between the state, the monarchy, and Islam, as well as the prevalence of Sufi, or Islamic mystical, practice among vast segments of the population. However, it was precisely in this context that the attacks of May 16, 2003, took place in Casablanca. The country's exceptional, ideational context guaranteed these small attacks an impact and influence far beyond their actual casualty figures, which were about 44 people, including about 14 attackers. For the following four years, the state played a cat-and-mouse game against the local Al Qaeda affiliates. By April 2007 with the dismantling of some of the most active terrorist cells that participated in the May 16, 2003, attacks, that conflict was resolved clearly in the favor of the state, but certain problems remained (Benchemsi, 2007, pp. 21-27). First, small unaffiliated groups and individuals continued to pose a threat. This threat was clearly displayed in the April 28, 2011 Argana cafe attack in Marrakesh that killed 17 people and injured 25 more people. Second, some Moroccans, particularly those from overseas and from Northern Morocco continued to join Al Qaeda and Da'esh, (the "Islamic state" organization), because of alienation and feelings of marginalization, and due to the ideological appeal of the extremists. For these reasons, the views that prompted the attacks continued to find currency among a minority of Moroccan people. The December 2018 murder by local Da'esh sympathizers of Louisa Vesterager Jespersen and Maren Ueland, two young Scandinavian tourists and hikers, caused the debates among Moroccan people at all levels surrounding

terrorism, religion, external influence, and the relationship with the Western world to be reignited. The attackers posted videos of their attacks and the state was able to arrest them and much of their support network. This was not surprising given that there are frequent arrests of terror suspects and a nearly continuous pace of cells being disrupted and neutralized. A recent example was the arrest of three Daesh sympathizers in Fez. The Director of the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation, Mr. Abdelhak El Khiyame, claimed that his agency apprehended 2,963 suspects and dismantled 341 cells between 2002 and 2016 (Igrouane, 2016).

Like any other country facing the problem of violent extremism, the Moroccan state has been trying to address the root causes of the attacks. For example, it created a development program that tried to address some of the socioeconomic grievances of the poorest citizens and engaged in a well-structured security campaign against the terrorist movements, without returning to the excesses of human rights violations of the past. The conventional policy of political reform, economic inclusion, and law enforcement worked quite well. In some ways, it helped create the political condition of relative deprivation, a situation where political instability increases despite overall economic improvements because some people are doing better than others. In this context, the Arab Spring arrived in Morocco in the form of the February 20th movement of 2011. The state's response to that movement included additional democratization and the election of an Islamist Democrat as the Government President – a position analogous to Prime Minister, since Morocco is a monarchy. The government's efforts are discussed here to provide some context for the reader; there are more extensive assessments of these efforts by the author and others elsewhere.

This paper focuses on a neglected aspect of the Moroccan struggle against extremism – religious debates surrounding terrorism. While religious reforms, such as the creation of women religious guides, requiring college level education for Imams and reforming the structure of religious education, have been an integral part of the Moroccan program against violent extremism, earlier attempts focused on security did not address theological questions that fed violence against Moroccan people, other Muslims, and non-Muslims alike when approached from a Takfiri (declaring other Muslims as apostates and anathemizing them as well as legitimating violence against them) perspective. The threat of violence coexists with the rejection of the State's approach to Islam, which were the rejection of the religious legitimacy of the state to gain currency, the door to more violence and even civil war will open. This is the theological challenge that needs to be addressed before Morocco can transition to a society where democracy and rule of law are actualized within a Muslim and conservative social context. Therefore, this paper addresses the origin, extent, and scope of Salafi and Wahhabi thought in a Moroccan context with particular emphasis on its most extreme views such as those held by the violent wings of Takfiri Salafis. It also addresses the State's responses to Salafis and Wahhabism in both historical and current settings. Nevertheless, the first and primary focus of this paper is the conversation that took place among self-avowed Moroccan Islamists concerning the origins of violent extremism. There is a vast gap in the literature concerning this issue, and this paper intends to bring some of these debates into the attention of the larger world.

Preliminary Considerations

This paper deals with the political challenge posed by non-governmental, particularly Wahhabi and Salafi theological positions, and focuses on the political and security implications of these challenges for the population and government of Morocco (in that order), but it does not take a position concerning the accuracy or "correctness" of any particular set of theological positions. Questions like "is Wahhabism a correct interpretation of Islam?" are outside the scope of this paper. There are many overlapping varieties of Wahhabism and Salafism movements, and most of these do not preach or practice violence. The author simply invites readers to place themselves in the shoes of a Salafi or Wahhabi Moroccan, who often is a small independent businessperson struggling to earn a living. After 2003, Moroccan Salafis and Wahhabis found themselves under the State's suspicion and under a certain level of social isolation as well. The vast majority of them do not support or condone violent extremism, but they nevertheless found themselves feared by many in the rest of the population, including, in some cases, their own relatives.

To complicate matters, the contributions of Salafi and Wahhabi communities to the Moroccan economy are significant. As stated earlier, these men and women are often active in small business, employing themselves and others, providing services and products, and engaging in new investments using their own savings. People living in Morocco would attest that the economic contribution of Salafi communities is vital, and that any program that aims to deal with their violent subset must avoid damaging the majority of its members and followers who do not condone violence. This paper looks at these beliefs only in terms of their security and political implications. Other people's rights are impacted only by the *actions* of some members of these communities, not by the *beliefs*, however exclusionary they may be, of the majorities within them. Nevertheless, given that terrorists have used these beliefs to justify their attacks, discussing them is legitimate within the rubric of political studies, because they are also political beliefs, provided that the *action/belief* distinction is kept in mind. Terrorists like Al-Mailoudi have openly stated that their beliefs motivated their attacks (Al-Mailoudi, Fezazi, Al-Shadali, & Hadous, 2003, pp. 47-48).

Definitions

For the purposes of this paper, terrorism, also referred to as violent extremism, is political violence committed by non-state movements or persons against civilians with the aim of using the resulting fear to insure political and/or social change. The term was used by anarchist and Marxist terrorists, including those who are self-avowed, without shame or odium in the past. One Marxist theorist and practitioner of terrorism took issue with the negativity attached to the term:

> The accusation of "violence" or "terrorism" no longer has the negative meaning it used to have. It has acquired new clothing; a new color. It does not divide, it does not discredit; on the contrary, it represents a center of attraction. Today, to be "violent" or a "terrorist" is a quality that ennobles any honorable person, because it is an act worthy of a revolutionary

> engaged in armed struggle against the shameful military dictatorship and its atrocities. (Marighella, 1969)

While Marxists like Marighella subscribed to the writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Mao, the violent segment of the Salafist movement has less clearly defined textual boundaries. Like Marxists however, they also tend to write prolifically about their reasons for carrying out the things they do. They often use theological arguments to justify their actions. So, Moroccan scholars, including Islamist and Salafi scholars, have attempted to distinguish between the various forms of Salafi and Wahhabi discourse. Implicitly, this paper uses a typology created by the late Moroccan Member of Parliament and religious scholar, Shaykh'Abd al-Barri Al-Zamzami. There are certain advantages to using a typology derived from Moroccan political life, because it is sensitive to the local context. Due to his interest in Islamic mores governing sexuality, Al-Zamzami was controversial in his lifetime and attracted both ridicule and praise from Moroccan social liberals and Salafis alike. Nevertheless, his typology, while clearly designed to uphold his own version of Salafism, can be very useful in navigating Moroccan perspectives of their Salafi and Wahhabi communities. He participated in the intellectual life of the country, making presentations in parliament and at scholarly conferences, so his eccentricity should not disqualify him from inclusion in this analysis.

Al-Zamzami blames the Gulf States for the spread of types of Salafism that he finds negative in Morocco. However, matters are more complex, as this paper shows in subsequent sections. He clearly exonerates Moroccan forms of Salafism, such as his own and those of 'Allal Al-Fasi, who campaigned for an independent Morocco and helped found the current political system, where liberalism influences what is essentially an Islamic kingdom (Howe, 2005). For Salafis and other Islamists, controversy over what constitutes both "true" Salafism and the "correct" application of the thoughts of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab is unavoidable. The table below summarizes and gives a formal structure to Al-Zamzami's thoughts on problematic forms Salafism in Morocco. It will be addressed in more detail in the section on theological challenges.

In the view of this author, a social scientist cannot take a stance on these questions since these questions are outside the scope of social sciences and properly belong to Islamic Theology. Nevertheless, it is possible to look at violence, which is a form of political actions, so the focus here is on actions rather than on beliefs. Beliefs, as claimed by the terrorists themselves, only become a topic of study here when they are acted upon. Consequently, the object of study here is the Jihadi Salafism with its complete focus on violence, terrorism, and war upon all non-believers, including other Muslims and its security implications.

Table 1
Al-Zamzami's Typology of "Incorrect" Forms of Salafism in Morocco

Type	Characteristics	Doctrine
Arabian Gulf-style Wahhabi Salafism	NGO-level institutionalization, "Quranic houses," and private and public financial support from the GCC states.	Represents an extension of Gulf approaches to Wahhabism in a Moroccan context. Differs from traditional and historic Moroccan approaches to Wahhabism.
Popular Salafism	An emphasis on appearances and the superficial characteristics of the movement, for example being bearded and insisting on the headscarf.	No textual references. It relies on adherence to satellite TV preachers.
Jihadi Salafism	A complete focus on violence, terrorism and war upon all non-believers, including other Muslims.	The ideas of Osama bin Laden and those who inspired him, including Abu al-Alaa Al-Mawdudi.
Isolationist Takfiri Salafism	Rejection of the rest of society as pagan and self-isolating, restricting social and personal relations to the "saved" community only.	Strict focus on Wahhabi foundational texts such as those written by Ibn Qaim Al-Jouyaza.

Source: Al-Zamzami, A. (2006). *Salafism and Terrorism*. Casablanca, Morocco: Al-Najah, al-Jadida, and Sunnah Publications, pp. 13-16.

Yet Al-Zamzami has to be placed in a global context. "Salafi" and "Wahhabi" are terms that have been confused and conflated. There is ideological overlap between the two movements, and they are often confused, precisely because their extremist wings tend to overlap and function as one. As with the rest of the world, Moroccan Salafis represent a broader movement than the specific Wahhabi movement which originated in what is now known as Saudi Arabia in the 18th century. A Salafi is a Muslim who adheres to the path of the pious predecessors (*al-Salaf al-Salih*), in contrast to those who adhere to *al-Khalaf al-Falih* (the productive successors). The term has seen multiple uses over the generations, with people as diverse as Melcom Khan of Iran, and Mohmmed Abduh and Abu al-'Alaa al-Mawdudi of Pakistan being labeled Salafis. In the Moroccan context, the ideology of Al-Fasi has been described as Salafi-inspired, because it postulated that Morocco must be a Muslim rather than a secular state. The term is consequently fluid and needs proper contextualization both in terms of time and place. Al-Zamzami is essentially saying that there are correct versions of Salafism and Wahhabism and these tended to be the earlier forms in Morocco; consequently, his typology allows us to see some of the diversity in the Moroccan Salafi and Wahhabi movements. As

for Wahhabism, it is a simpler term, because it refers to its founder, Mohammed Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab an 18th century religious reformer and political activist aligned with the dynasty that came to rule Saudi Arabia. Like many other Salafis, he followed the Hanbali tradition of jurisprudence. It is his work, particularly his reading of Ibn Tammiya, and that of his students that forms the textual basis of what became Wahhabism. Wahhabism relies on asserting that the precedent of Ibn Tammiya and Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab is pious, and consequently, it is a Salafi movement. There are non-Wahhabi Salafists, and the two terms are not interchangeable, despite considerable overlap (Bin Ali & Bin Sudiman, 2016).

Normative Considerations

Given the topic, there is also no escape from normative considerations, and this paper is no exception. This analysis stands with violent extremism’s civilian victims first. It also stands with people who face ostracism for their religious views despite not advocating or practicing violence. To that end, this paper uses a combination of history, participant observation, and perspectives of Moroccan leaders as a basis for outlining the theological challenge in a Moroccan context. To do so, it outlines the overall Moroccan counter-extremism effort, details the history of Moroccan Salafi and Wahhabi movements in the country, and summarizes the overall Moroccan policy response in the religious field, particularly the theological response of the State. Since these items are ultimately reflected in government policies, the overall approach is influenced by elements of policy evaluation methods. In this case, the ultimate measure of success is a decline in the performance of terrorist outfits within the country. Finally, this paper takes what terrorists say about their motives seriously. Like their Marxist and Anarchist forerunners, Al Qaeda, Da’esh and their supporters have been vocal both in print and in public statements about their motives. Taking them seriously, understanding their points of reference, and responding to them must be part and parcel of any policy designed to reduce violence.

Attempts at Social and Economic Reforms

Economic improvement is a vital action for governments to take in response to violent extremism. Poverty creates an environment that, directly or indirectly, enables violent extremism to grow. On the eve of the May 16, 2003 attacks, the Moroccan economy languished far behind that of Southern Europe and unemployment was rife. The tourism sector did not have its current dynamism and access to and from the country was very expensive. The largest sector in terms of employment was and remains agriculture and most people still resided in the countryside when the attacks took place. While Morocco still lags behind Southern and Eastern Europe, the per capita gross national product on a purchasing power parity basis (per capita GDP/PPP) rose from 3985 USD in 2002 to 7841 USD in 2015 (World Bank, 2011).

These improvements owed a lot to monetary stability, wherein the Moroccan dirham is tied to a basket of currencies dominated by the Euro, while trading in a controlled market. Other factors that assisted economic growth have been government encouragement of manufacturing, especially of automobiles and

aircraft parts for export. The call center industry, specializing in providing services in French and Spanish, was an early success. The economy now suffers from a paradox of a labor shortage combined with unemployment, which is a better dilemma than unemployment alone. The problem is increasingly refusal of urban youth to participate in the workforce due to perceptions of low wages when compared to the same professions in Europe, and a simpler problem – the lack of qualified individuals. Despite the obvious and clear improvement of the overall economy, Morocco still needs a rather generous welfare and development policy because poverty remains dire and widespread. Poverty complicates the government's counter-extremism efforts. The government's National Initiative for Human Development (INDH in its French abbreviation), whose first phase ran over a five-year period until 2010, appeared after the attacks. The initiative was partially motivated by a desire to reduce the appeal of violent extremism, which in Morocco takes a religio-political form, but it was also a studied response to a rather dire situation. The program's first phase cost about 1.2 billion U.S. Dollars over its five-year life. However, the Initiative struggled especially in its attempts to impact rural livelihoods:

> At the launch of the operation (2005), Morocco suffered from high levels of poverty (14.2%, with a further 23% 'economically vulnerable'), strikingly poor income inequality, and low human development indicators. Over half of adults were illiterate, compared to an average of 10% for lower middle-income countries. Poverty was equally pronounced in both rural and urban areas, albeit with different characteristics. Although half of public expenditures were allocated to the social sectors, access and quality were limited, particularly for rural people because of the centrally driven approach, with low levels of participation, weak coordination amongst line ministries, and inadequate targeting. (World Bank, 2013)

The growing pains of the program marked the first phase. The country had to confront a wide variety of social issues head on with few resources. The second phase saw the construction of new highways, high speed rail, and solar and wind power plants. The program is now in its third phase, as new facilities are being opened by the King under its own title and structure (Nafaa, 2017), and was referred to as a priority by the current Minister of Finance (*Le360Live*, 2017). Assessing the program's impact is outside the scope of this paper. The INDH program began after the May 16, 2003, attacks.

Political Reforms

The early reaction to the May 16th attacks, initially included the continuation of the alternation policy with the elected parliament and State, wherein the monarch shared power with an elected prime minister elected by the majority coalition in parliament. By 2007, a conservative, Istiqlal Party-led, government chose a set of policies that many Moroccans found restrictive. By that same year, Al Qaedas sound defeat in Morocco had become apparent, and the more conservative political

forces with Moroccan society and government felt that the threat had waned. Istiqlal is a conservative, nationalist party that led the country to independence; its ideology reflects the thinking of Al-Fassi and emphasizes the Islamic nature of Morocco. Historically, it endorsed the Arabization of Morocco and the abandonment of Tamazight. Therefore, the pace of political reforms that began under the alternation governments in the late 1990s slowed and in some cases reversed. "Alteration" was a power-sharing agreement between Hasan II and the Socialist opposition. The post of prime minister alternated between a monarchist prime minister and the socialist opposition. The real or perceived decline in freedoms during 2007-2011 set the stage for the Arab Spring in Morocco. The Moroccan Arab Spring took the form of a non-violent youth protest movement named after the day it was launched on February 20, 2011. The movement was supported by the youth wings of nearly all mainstream Moroccan political parties. It had the support of well-known and well-connected businesspeople like Karim Tazi and the late Miloud Chaabi (Mekouar, 2016).

In response to the February 20th Movement, the king offered reform. These measures included a referendum on a new constitution, more powers shifted to the parliament, and the replacement of the Prime Minister's office with a newly elected government president, a title borrowed from Spanish practice, akin to the term "Minister-President" used in Germany and Belgium. The ensuing elections saw the emergence of the Islamist-democratic Justice and Development Party (PJD) as the leading partner in the government coalition. The party performed well in office and secured re-election, but the parliamentary dynamics prevented the re-election of its leader 'Abdel-Ilah Benkirane as government president. While there has been noted progress towards democracy in Morocco, the present situation falls short of the reform vision outlined by the king on March 9, 2011 (Mohammed VI, 2011). In part, the shortcomings were due to the fear expressed by the political parties and the political class over issues related to Moroccan identity, including religion. The political debates on Moroccan religious identity necessarily included the Islamist Party of Justice and Development, which won the two following elections.

Religious Reforms

While the political, economic, and policy reforms can be said to reduce the risks of violence, the root cause of terrorism in Morocco lies in issues connected with certain extremist interpretations of religion first and foremost. It has been argued by Sa'id Al-Kahal, a leftist secular Moroccan thinker, that there is no economic or political reason for the violence. By pointing to the attackers' own statements, Al-Kahal argues that the attackers' reasons are primarily eschatological. He highlights a statement made in court to a judge by Mohamed Damir, a suspect connected to the May 16th attacks who viewed his actions as ones that would find favor on the final day by God:

> I would like to surround you with the knowledge that I committed the actions of which I am accused; I committed them and did them upon the knowledge of the book of God and the *sunnah* of his prophet … I am happy … because I [am] being tried for

> commanding the good and prohibiting that which is forbidden. (Al-Kahal, 2008, p. 271)

Damir clearly articulated the challenge to the state posed by his particular strand of the Salafi movement, and to its credit, the government has been trying to institute reforms to address the ideological challenge it faces. To start, it began reasserting its monopoly on the religious sphere. After the April 2007 attacks, the state shut down "Qu'ranic Houses" controlled by Mohammed 'Abd al-Rahman Al-Maghraoui. Al-Maghraoui is known for enjoining the marriage of nine-year old girls in a well-known fatwa he had issued online (Hemimat, 2009, pp. 103-111). Today, the state requires aspiring imams to possess a bachelor's degree with at least the equivalent of a "B" average, have knowledge of foreign languages, and undergo additional instruction on special topics such as Social Psychology. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs also reformed the curriculum on clerical seminaries and female religious counselors. Theses counselors, or *Murshidat* in the Arabic plural, were the first such step ever undertaken in the Islamic world (Ministry of Religious Foundations and Islamic Affairs, 2006).

The Theological Challenge

As Al-Zamzami (2006) argued, there are Moroccan versions of Salafism, which include elements of Wahhabism in their approach to the religion. While the state is Maliki (based on the Sunni school established by Imam Malik Ibn Anas, who emphasized the precedents set in Medina by the Prophet of Islam and the people of the city or as he called it "the work of the people of Medina") in jurisprudence, Asha'ari (following the ideas of Asha'ari who emphasized the need for context and discussion while arguing that some things need to be accepted on faith) in doctrine, and Sufi (mystical and directly relational to God through mystical practice) in foundation, it has had a long history of interaction with the Wahhabi movement from its inception onwards (Ministry of Religious Foundations and Islamic Affairs, 2017). It is important to note that the Muslim world does not view its own divisions in the same manner of denominational differences within Buddhist and Christian traditions. Informal and less structured influence has been ongoing since the 18th century, when Wahhabism emerged. Wahhabism's influence in Morocco is so significant that a book, *Wahhabism: the Founder, the Thought and the Movement* (Belkabir, 2004) written by some of the country's leading luminaries, was prepared in its defense in an attempt to de-link it from the attacks that took place only six weeks prior. The manuscript went to the printer the following year and is a valuable insight on how Wahhabism is understood by the country's intellectual elite. The book attempts to defend Wahhabism as a well-meaning, if largely unsuccessful, reform movement. It contains a speech by the Sultan Slimane (1766-1822, reigning from 1792 until his death) attacking certain folk practices such as festivals and shrine visits. One article underscores the connection between Sultan Mohamed Ibn Abdullah, Moulay Slimane's grandfather, who was a contemporary and a supporter of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Professor Abdelhadi

Boutaleb (deceased in 2009), a senior Moroccan scholar and a diplomat, recognizes the historical roots of the Moroccan Wahhabi movement in the book:

> Sultan Mohamed ibn Abdullah led an important reform movement. He focused his attention on the science of *hadith*, which is the source of the Salafi movement since the time of Ahmed ibn Hanbal and Ibn Tammiya. He introduced Morocco to the foundations of Imam Ahmed [sic Ibn Hanbal] and the foundations of Ibn Hanifa, which were not known in Morocco … He was a true Salafi, who described himself as Maliki in jurisprudential orientation and Hanbali in belief. He forbade the reading of books based on *kalam* [sic "dialogue" meaning philosophical debate] along Ash'arite lines, and enjoined stopping at beliefs taking from the apparent meaning of the book and the *Sunnah* without interpretation in the *Salafi* way. (Boutaleb, 2004, p.142)

Boutaleb is recalling a very different Salafism and a very different Wahhabism that existed in Morocco's past. Not only that, the peaceful life exemplified by Boutaleb and other academic admirers of Wahhabism stands in sharp contrast to the lifestyles enjoined and pursued by the terrorists. Having served as the Moroccan ambassador to the United States, Boutaleb's political and personal philosophy was clearly realistic and pragmatic. Like other authors in the book, he appears to think that Wahhabism can be a progressive force. The authors go as far as to invoke the late Mohamed 'Abed Al-Jabri, a professor of philosophy and Islamic thought at Mohammed V University and a quasi-secular thinker (deceased 2010) criticized for his free thought by Salafis (Al-Hababi, 2004, p. 160).

The pragmatic and rationalistic ideas of Boutaleb concerning Wahhabism are not shared by Takfiri Salafists (see table on page 4) who would condemn him for consorting and interacting with pagans (the Americans) during his stint as ambassador in the United States. The Wahhabi movement has been characterized by excess and over-politicization, according to a leading Salafi figure, Farid Al-Ansari (2007). An often misunderstood and underestimated theologian, Al-Ansari was a social activist in the Unification and Reform Movement (*Tawhid wa Islah*). This was the social movement underpinning the Moroccan Party of Justice and Development. One of his works directly relates to politics and his concerns about the Islamist movement in Morocco (Al-Ansari, 2007). Al-Ansari clearly states that the Moroccan Islamist movement in general has been too harsh against Maliki Islam, Moroccan Sufism, and the use of non-Hanbali (Hanbalism is the Sunni school established by Ahmed Ibn Hanbal, emphasizing the literal application of the Qu'ran, within which Wahhabism arose) references to the point of anathematization or *takfir.* Al-Ansari (2007) calls out the Islamist movement for creating six "idols," to include, "the idolization of the Hanbali denomination in the Salafi movement." Concerning this final idol, Al-Ansari hones an internal critique of his own movement. First, Al-Ansari argues that the attacks on Maliki Islam, under a new generation of Salafi and Wahhabi scholars in Morocco have alienated both the state and many other Moroccans. Second, he argues that their insistence on ideological purity has harmed their community by fomenting internal divisions. Third, he

argues that the movement's attacks on Sufism have earned it the hostility of Sufi orders in Morocco and their suspicion. Fourth, he argued the movement emphasized external appearances of piety instead of a values framework. Fifth, he argued that the form actually advocated by the Salafi and Wahhabi movement is basically what is practiced in the Gulf States (which he does not mention by name), and that it is a form alien to the needs and historical heritage of Morocco (Al-Ansari, 2007, pp. 141-175). In short, Al-Ansari forcefully argues that the Moroccan Wahhabi and Salafist movement is founded on a rejection, a nearly complete one, of Moroccan traditional approaches to religion. The rejection includes earlier versions of Salafism that were brought by Sultan Mohamed Ibn Abdullah, his grandson Sultan Slimane, independence leader 'Allal Al-Fasi, as well as followers of the current movement in Morocco. Since the Moroccan constitution and tradition establish the monarch as the commander of the faithful in Morocco, and Islam as the official religion, the theological and political challenge posed by the more extreme and violent Wahhabi and Salafist Islamist movements is serious, because it leaves no room for compromise.

This challenge is based on specific readings and interpretations of religious texts. As these can be classified, they are the closest item that can exist to a "cause" for violent extremism in a Moroccan context. Such causes were outlined by Abu Zaid Al-Maqari al-Idrissi (2010), a PJD member of parliament, a linguist, and a researcher in Islamic thought. In essence, he complements and elaborates upon the criticisms raised by Al-Ansari. He outlines five broad levels of causation for terrorism: these are cultural, psychological, mental, militant, and political. In terms of what he calls a cultural set of causes, he also identifies five important factors that lead people to become extremists. The first one is simply not having the tools to understand what the Qu'ran means. The second one is the detachment of written word from its context, including the Qu'ranic verses related to war. The third factor involves the mixing of missionary work with governance, failing to understand the difference between the two stages. Fourth, the confusion of what God appears to promise non-believers with what believers ought to do to them. The fifth factor involves mixing "right and wrong" in terms of interacting with other cultures, movements, and sects. Like Al-Kahal, Al-Zamzami and implicitly Al-Ansari, Al-Maqari al-Idrissi places the cause of violent extremism first and foremost in ideology. On the psychological level, he identifies a psychology of oppression and despair that invites retaliation against the other; he points out that the traditional distinctions between individuals and their nation-states has broken down in people's minds. At the mental level, he puts blame on media in general for making Islam appear more militant and violent than other religions, which has two effects: it feeds Islamophobia and simultaneously encourages violence. At the militant level, he argues that many people believe that military might is the proof that can show the correctness of the Islamic message and therefore warring against other populations is warranted. Finally, at the political level, he argues that there are grievances, such as Palestine, held by Muslims that feed extremism (Al-Maqari al-Idrissi, 2010, pp. 62-72).

The Role of Education and Dialogue

While security and law enforcement measures are important, they cannot stop terrorism without the help of society/government in addressing the underlying threats that extreme Salafi Jihadi interpretations of Islam pose to the Moroccan state and its citizens. As stated earlier, it is important to avoid the pitfall of putting the Salafi movement in Morocco into a single category. The clear majority of Salafis and Wahhabis do not practice or preach violence. A royal declaration, or *dahir*, was issued in 2016 calling for reforming the religious education system in Morocco to emphasize the values of peaceful co-existence, moderation, and tolerance with other cultures, civilizations, and religions. The declaration set off a debate on how to reform religious education, as well as debates between those advocating "Islamic" education against those advocating "comparative religious studies." Nevertheless, the king's declaration was responding to the need to reduce the threats posed by the violent Jihadi minority branches of the Salafi movement (Al-Kafi, 2016, pp. 3-6). The strategy used the educational system to recruit members and spread counter-narratives (Benhamza, 2016, pp. 7-16).

Educational changes may help reduce the threat in the future, but they can do little to persuade convinced terrorists that they should give up their planned violence. Therefore, the government also pursued arrests which led to interactions that inevitably took place between the accused terrorists and the various officials in the Moroccan legal system. Subsequent dialogue in the courts resulted in requests for royal pardons, implying that the convicted terrorist accepts the legitimacy of the Moroccan state. This was the case with several Salafi clerics who had given sermons to the attackers but expressed reservations and retractions in prison. A more formal process took place where the head of the official Moroccan 'Ulema Association, Ahmed 'Abadi, met with a group of 12 convicted terrorists that were guided by the May 16th leader, Khalid Hadad. The dialogue included such topics as the Maliki school of jurisprudence, the Command of the Faithful (the Moroccan king's religious role), and issues related to dealing with non-Muslims. Based on recent reports, it appears that some of these prisoners are changing their minds out of conviction and not convenience (Abu al-Ma'ali, 2017).

Conclusion

Overall, the complex and multifaceted Moroccan response to the challenge posed by the terrorists and their ideology has been effective. It may be useful to ask what other countries can do for Morocco, but there is little that outsiders can do. Nevertheless, there are things that are actionable for foreign states and actors in terms of reducing the level of threat both within Morocco and outside it. These actions may not be politically popular or economically cheap, but they are doable. These include enhanced levels of aid and investment in Morocco as well as a more cautious approach to Salafi movements than the one exhibited by the West in the Middle East and Syria. Aside from not creating violence in places like Libya and Syria, providing help to countries like Morocco also means accepting that these states are a product of a very different political and religious history. Other areas of cooperation would include security sector reform and educational improvement.

Ultimately, however, the theological challenge represented by the extremist segments of the Salafi movement can be met only by the ideological resources of the local states and governments in question and the religious establishments they support. The good news concerning the challenge posed by violent extremists is that the Islamist movement itself is taking them seriously and is taking apart their arguments. No less a Salafi thinker than the late Farid Al-Ansari has criticized the tendency to exclude, demonize, and condemn other people, and the whole mainstream of Islamist community is engaged in a debate concerning their origins and what to do about violent extremism, and that is a far cry from the denial that met the attacks on both May 16, 2003, and on 9/11.

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